

## 1. Public and School Library Update

- **BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST:** Superintendent Burmaster's DPI budget request for 2009-2011 includes "cost to continue" funding without loss of existing services for current programs under the **four statewide resource contracts** (Cooperative Children's Book Center, Wisconsin Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, and inter-library loan contracts with Wisconsin Library Services and the Milwaukee Public Library), cost to cover additional curriculum-supporting data bases for **BadgerLink**, and **public library system aids** which enable multi-county cooperation and inter-library loan. Additional initiatives for **library delivery service** and **NFB-Newsline funding** to support newspapers accessible by telephone for blind and physically handicapped individuals are also included in the library-related category.
- **ECONOMY IMPACTS LOCAL LIBRARY SERVICES:** Maintenance of state funding in the above areas is essential as public libraries throughout Wisconsin are reporting significant increases in circulation of books and other materials, as well as public computer terminal use during the current economic crisis. Public libraries are "government's living room" – a very visible and vital symbol of democracy and equal access to information. As personal finances are stretched to the breaking point and access to more and more government websites, job applications, income tax forms and other essentials becomes accessible only through electronic means, more citizens who cannot afford to maintain home computers (or are still struggling with dial-up access in rural areas) are depending even more upon public libraries.
- **THE FUTURE OF WISCONSIN LIBRARIES – PROMOTING LIBRARY VALUE:** Last spring, Northstar Economics Inc. released a study of public library value titled "**The Economic Contribution of Wisconsin Public Libraries to the Economy of Wisconsin.**" A key finding was that \$4.06 is returned to state taxpayers for every \$1 invested in public libraries (Summary brochure: <http://www.wisconsinlibraries.org/materials/libs/EconImpactBrochure.pdf>) The study was featured at the **Council on Libraries and Network Development (COLAND) Strategic Visioning Summit** on May 5-6, 2008. A working draft of the "**Beginnings Report on the Future of Wisconsin Libraries**" and additional information is found at the COLAND website <https://blog.uwgb.edu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/coland/coland-draft.pdf> At its most recent meeting on January 9, COLAND discussed a proposal to apply for federal LSTA funds so as to commission a similar study on the economic value of school libraries.
- **FURTHER DECLINE IN NUMBER OF SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALISTS:** A survey has revealed that **210 Wisconsin School districts were served by only 1 or less FTE certified Library Media Specialist (LMS) during the 2007-08 school year and 9 districts had no LMS at all. The statewide average ratio of K-12 students to each FTE LMS is 753 to 1.** Reference Wis. Administrative Code PI 8.01(2) (h) which states that each school board shall provide library media services to 7-12 pupils performed by licensed library and audiovisual personnel and in grades K-6 perform same services either by or under the direction of same.

Public libraries and school libraries are symbiotic. Budgetary crises and service gaps in either case cannot help but impact the sister institution in the community they both serve. This is particularly crucial in rural areas where transportation and broadband issues are key to information access by average citizens.

## 2. Rhinelander Schools Update

### THE GOOD

The Northwoods Community Secondary School (NCSS) in Rhinelander has been selected as a “Visionary Lab School” by the EdVisions School Network. Edvisions is a coalition of 65 small high schools across the country supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. As a Visionary Lab School, NCSS will help to mentor teachers and administrators throughout the state who are developing project-based schools. NCSS is also welcoming visitors to observe project-based learning in action.

Further information about NCSS can be found at <http://www.rhinelanderk12.wi.us/ncss/>

See also *Rhineland Daily News*, “NCSS selected as visionary school”

<http://www.rhinelanddailynews.com/articles/2008/12/19/news/doc494baf410a05486302003.txt> and <http://www.newsofthenorth.net/article.cfm?articleID=24467> accompanied by a slide show from NCSS.

### THE INNOVATIVE

The school district of Rhinelander is considering partnering with Ripco Credit Union to establish a student-operated credit union at Rhinelander High School. If the partnership is approved by the school board, Ripco would equip the ticket booth in the RHS commons area for use as a credit union. The credit union would also have an ATM. Student tellers would operate the credit union on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. According to Ripco’s proposal, the credit union would offer most basic services available at the main Ripco Credit Union branch. Students and faculty would be able to open savings and checking accounts, apply for debit and credit cards and pick up loan applications.

<http://www.rhinelanddailynews.com/articles/2009/01/02/news/doc495ee24321bbb688622947.txt>

### ...AND THE UNDISPUTABLY UGLY (in the wake of a third failed referendum attempt)

#### SDR cuts point to grim future

*By Giles Morris, Rhinelander Daily News Staff* January 8, 2009

As the discussion surrounding the School District of Rhinelander’s (SDR) forecasted budget cuts becomes more and more concrete, the impact they will have on the district’s schools is coming into focus. On Tuesday night, Rhinelander High School (RHS) Principal Terry Fondow introduced a preliminary short list of cuts to parents and students that would dramatically alter the school’s educational experience.

The list should not have come as a total surprise, since Fondow previewed the cuts at a meeting in December, but it must still have been a shock to some.

Fondow said he is likely to recommend cutting one teaching position from each of the following five departments: music, art, foreign language, special education, and engineering technology.

Fondow said the list is preliminary and he is still open to discussing its merits, but he said his priority is to limit the impact on the core of the school’s language arts, mathematics, and science curricula.

“First and foremost is to protect the core and to know what business you’re in. We want to stay as close to a comprehensive high school as we can be but we have to protect the core and I won’t cut in those areas unless those cuts are warranted by extenuating factors,” Fondow said.

He also said RHS will not be able to cut in the same areas next year, even though the budget shortfall will likely be similar.

“I think a school of close to 1,000 students to have just one music teacher and one art teacher, you’re at the bone,” Fondow said.

In addition to the academic program cuts, Fondow said he could recommend cutting the following co-curricular activities: girls’ hockey, wrestling, gymnastics, alpine skiing, forensics, boys and girls swimming.

The activities cuts would save the district around \$250,000.

Fondow said he understands how upsetting the cuts are for parents.

"People aren't happy. People are sad and disappointed. The reactions vary all the way from an e-mail from a person who said 'Cut one, cut them all,' to another who said it's a tragedy and they'll move their family to an area that offers the activities they want to be involved in," said Fondow.

But he wants people to understand the cuts are only the beginning, because the state's contribution to the district's budget will continue to decrease by nearly \$2 million over each of the next three years.

"What I'm trying to tell people is their district is being dismantled. What I'm proposing may not have to happen this year but we are looking at cutting \$2 million a year. The future is not going to be the same as the past. What we need to do is help ourselves," Fondow said.

RHS is only one of the schools in the district likely to feel the brunt of the budget crisis. This week SDR Superintendent Roger Erdahl will inform staff of other possible cuts. The same information will be made available to the public some time next week to prepare for the school board's committee of the whole meeting on Jan. 18 where the whole menu of potential cuts will be discussed in a public forum.

School Board President Chuck Fitzgerald emphasized that the board still has a number of options and wants feedback from the community before it makes its decisions.

"These are projected cuts. Once the community has had the chance to see the cuts, we'll be holding the first committee of the whole meeting where the community will be able to comment," Fitzgerald said.

But Fitzgerald also emphasized that the district is facing a stark reality.

**"No matter what we look at, there will be staff drawdowns and program drawdowns," Fitzgerald said. "You don't take \$2 million out of a \$28 million budget without it being grim."**

**Fitzgerald said the district's revenue increase cap of about 1.5 percent next year prevents it from keeping pace with its cost increases, which are close to 5 percent. As the state's contribution to the district budget continues to decrease in relation to dropping enrollment and rising property values, residents face a future with two options-- pay the difference themselves or swallow the cuts.**

**The Northland Pines School District recently announced it would go to referendum in April to exceed its revenue limit by \$2.9 million for each of the next three years in order to preserve its operating budget. Northland Pines has won two such referenda in recent years, but Rhinelander's larger size and significantly lower property wealth make the prospect of passing a referendum that would further increase property taxes for a recurring purpose doubtful.**

According to Fondow, revenue cap increase referenda have been historically unsuccessful but may be the only option remaining for school districts in northern Wisconsin that wish to preserve their programs intact.

Fitzgerald said the school board would consider all of its options, including a referendum to exceed the district's revenue cap.

"What we're giving the community is the existing facts about the cuts we have to make because of the state aid formula," said Fitzgerald. "One of the options we are looking at is do we go to referendum and what kind will we go to?"

**The bottom line is that Rhinelander schools face a bleak future unless the state changes its funding formula or district residents vote to pay more property taxes.**

**"The state aid formula is impacting every school district up here," Fitzgerald said. "If you want to address the issue, you have to look at addressing it with your legislators to modify the state aid formula and/or consider a referendum, or you have to face the dismantling of the school district."**

Fondow will hold another meeting with community students and parents at the James Williams Middle School at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday.

<http://www.rhinelanderdailynews.com/articles/2009/01/08/news/doc49660c03c3838343247584.txt>

**RHS officials begin budget cutting process with review** (December 6, 2008) Projected budget shortfall is \$1.5 to \$2 million.

<http://www.rhinelanderdailynews.com/articles/2008/12/06/news/doc493a069f9d008324544232.txt>

**Difficult Decisions** (November 14, 2008) Change to 7-period day lowers graduation requirements.

<http://www.rhinelanderdailynews.com/articles/2008/11/15/news/doc491d89eddd3a0051399273.prt>

**Lack of clarity from voter's group angers board president** (October 22, 2008) Sparks fly as third try divides community.

<http://www.rhinelanderdailynews.com/articles/2008/10/22/news/doc48ff2e11685ae930190016.txt>